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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Lebanon and Syria
- [1](#)3. Iran: Nuclear Program

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Key stories in the media:  
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Maariv reported that associates of PM Sharon ordered five different public opinion polls to try to predict the results of elections held after a possible split in the Likud: the results of the survey, allegedly intended to frighten the Likud "rebels" so that they do not topple the government by voting against the 2005 state budget, show that a Sharon-led party comprised of disengagement supporters would garner 44 Knesset seats, and that a Netanyahu-led party including opponents to the disengagement would receive 21 seats. Jerusalem Post quoted sources in the "rebels" as saying that renegade Likud Knesset members have asked MKs who intend to oppose the budget to tell Sharon that they will vote in favor, in order to catch Sharon by surprise and topple his government.

The media (banner in Ha'aretz) reported that according to a tentative understanding reached by Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh Thursday, the IDF is preparing to evacuate the Philadelphi route, along the Gazan-Egyptian border, sometime after the disengagement from Gaza is completed. Leading media quoted Mofaz as saying that despite Egyptian demands, the IDF would continue to maintain control of the strategic corridor until it was certain that the smuggling of weapons into the Palestinian-controlled areas had ceased. Leading media reported that the final details of the arrangement are expected to be worked out at a meeting between Israeli and Egyptian military officials. The media quoted Mubarak's spokesman Suleiman Awad as saying that the newly named Egyptian ambassador is to arrive in Tel Aviv within a week (on Sunday, according to some media).

Israel Radio quoted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan as saying Thursday that the American view of Hizbullah has not changed, after New York Times reported a modification in Washington's policy. Ha'aretz cited a similar remark by PDAS David Satterfield. All media reported that in an overwhelming vote (473 in favor, 8 against, and 33 abstentions), the European Parliament decided Thursday to call on the European Council to place Hizbullah on its list of terrorist organizations. The resolution is not binding on the EU, but the media say it will influence Hizbullah's recruitment and funding.

Ha'aretz quoted PDAS Satterfield as saying Thursday that Israel has yet to live up to its promise to remove illegal settler outposts. Leading media reported that at Sunday's cabinet meeting, Sharon will propose that a ministerial committee headed by Justice Minister Tzipi Livni be set up to discuss the conclusions of the Sasson report on illegal settler outposts. Leading media cited a statement made Thursday by Education Minister Limor Livnat (Likud) that outposts set up before 2001 should not be dismantled, and that the outpost issue should not come up for legislation. Yediot quoted Labor MK Yuli Tamir as saying that the committee will serve as an escape hatch for Sharon to

avoid making decisions and to continue funding outposts.

Ha'aretz (Amos Harel) says that U.S. envoy Lt. Gen. William Ward will keep a low profile during his mission in the country, and that the level of protection around him will be high, in light of the October 2003 attack against a U.S. convoy in the Gaza Strip. The newspaper quoted a senior European military officer who served with Ward in Bosnia as saying that Ward left a marking impression on him. Ha'aretz also reported that Israeli and American officers shared a great deal of information at this week's IDF-organized conference on Low-Intensity Warfare.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who is due to arrive in the country on Sunday for the inauguration of a new museum at Yad Vashem, was quoted as saying in an exclusive interview with Yediot's Shimon Shiffer that Syria must pull out its troops out from Lebanon, and that Sharon's disengagement move, which will make possible the establishment of a Palestinian state, had constituted a surprise as he acts alone in opposition to his party. Annan said that he is not ruling out the possibility that one day Israel will be a member of the Security Council, and that this depends on the progress Israel achieves in resolving the conflict with the Palestinians. The newspaper says that the interview is an attempt by Annan to conciliate Israel over the negative attitude it faces at the UN. Jerusalem Post reported that Louise Arbor, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has told Minister-without-Portfolio Natan Sharansky that she hopes that in the framework of the new reforms being discussed in the UN, Israel will receive more balanced treatment inside the world body, especially in forums that deal with human rights.

Israel Radio reported that the police declared a high state of alert this morning in Jerusalem following warnings about a possible terror attack. The level of alert has since decreased. Yediot and Hatzofe reported on a warm encounter between Vice Premier Shimon Peres and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika at Madrid's international conference on terrorism. Yediot reported that Peres also met with Sudanese, Mauritanian, and Moroccan leaders.

Lebanese-American Ziyad Abdelnour was quoted as saying in an interview with Maariv that President Bush told him that the U.S. would eventually crack the Syrian "nut."

Israel Radio quoted Washington sources as saying that the U.S. is prepared to change its policy vis-a-vis Iran, by raising its international status and having European countries agree to bring the nuclear issue to the UN Security Council.

Asked by Jerusalem Post why the U.S. has decided to send New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to next week's dedication of Yad Vashem's new museum, the spokesman of the U.S. Embassy to Israel warmly cited New Yorkers' and Mayor Bloomberg's strong ties with Israel. Ha'aretz also mentioned President Bush's decision on the matter.

Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday, the U.S. House of Representatives' International Relations Committee authorized the transfer of USD 200 million in assistance to the PA.

Ha'aretz reported that an explanatory kit on the disengagement plan prepared by the IDF's Education Corps points out that all settlements in the territories are part of the historic continuum in the Land of Israel (i.e. Israel, including the territories). The kit makes no mention of the public debate in Israel over the settlements and omits anti-settlement groups such as Peace Now.

Yediot reported that a Baghdad Times correspondent will arrive in Israel today for a 10-day stay, on which he will report in his newspaper.

Yediot confirms the appointment of veteran journalist Rafi Ginat as editor-in-chief of the newspaper. He will enter his position at the end of April. The newspaper says that Yoel Esteron, former deputy editor-in-chief of Ha'aretz, was appointed deputy editor-in-chief of Yediot in early January.

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1. Mideast:  
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#### Summary:

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Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "Abu Mazen has already informed the Americans that he is not the slightest bit interested in any entity that mentions an interim solution even by the merest implication." Editor-in-Chief Lutfi Mashour wrote in weekly Arabic-language Assennara: "The disengagement --withdrawal -- from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank is the beginning of many other disengagements inside of Israel."

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "[President Bush's resolve] will mean little if, when tested on the frontlines of the battle between the forces of terror and the forces of democracy in the PA and Lebanon, the Bush administration allows the European obstructionists and their terror allies to take the lead."

#### Block Quotes:

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#### I. "They Don't Want Provisional"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (March 10): "The main subject in preliminary talks with American officials prior to Abu Mazen's visit to the U.S., expected to occur within the next two or three weeks, is President George W. Bush's 'vision'.... Abu Mazen has already informed the Americans that he is not the slightest bit interested in any entity that mentions an interim solution even by the merest implication.... The provisional state suit was tailored at the time to the measurements of Abu Mazen and his ilk in order to bypass the Israeli argument/excuse that as long as Yasser Arafat is alive and kicking, there is no Palestinian partner for a permanent status solution.... For Bush to manage to realize his vision before he becomes a lame duck in his last year at the White House, he has to change not only the timetable of the road map but also Sharon's basic perception that nothing is urgent and that negotiations on a final status agreement can wait for generations to come.... No one is more aware of the timetable than [Bush] is and no one understands better than he that a new president coming into the White House will start everything all over again from square one.... According to [a senior Israeli official], Secretary of State Rice is not at all the same as national security advisor Rice. Her milieu is now the Arab and European foreign ministers, the UN and other international organizations. As far as they are concerned, the disengagement is nothing but a marginal introduction to the elimination of an exhausting conflict."

#### II. "The Disengagement"

Editor-in-Chief Lutfi Mashour wrote in weekly Arabic-language Assennara (February 18): "The disengagement -- withdrawal -- from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank is the beginning of many other disengagements inside of Israel -- 'disengagements' from 'many occupations' that have neither limit nor retention. The disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank won't be the toughest disengagement that Israel will have to face in the future. Yes, building Israel begins now. The government's policy regarding 'occupations' and 'settlements' is much more dangerous to its entity than what the occupation and disengagement we are facing now might do. The only tests Israel will have to face are the coming internal 'disengagements,' of course, after the external disengagements are completed."

#### III. "Don't Wobble, Mr. President"

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 10): "This week saw Pakistan admit that the father of its nuclear program, A.Q. Khan, sold nuclear centrifuges to Iran. It saw thousands of Pakistani women demonstrating against tribal rapes. It saw thousands of Kuwaiti women demonstrating for the right to vote. And it saw Bush nominate John Bolton, one of the strongest voices for moral clarity and firm action against terrorists and their state sponsors in the world, as U.S. ambassador to the UN. All of these events are indicators of the power of presidential resolve to change the world for the better while successfully routing terrorists and the regimes that sponsor them. Yet all of this will mean little if, when tested on the frontlines of the battle between the forces of terror and the forces of democracy in the PA and Lebanon, the Bush administration allows the European obstructionists and their terror allies to take the lead."

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12. Lebanon and Syria:  
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Summary:  
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Editor-in-Chief David Horovitz wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Tuesday's rally was a blatant exhibition not of Assad's primacy but of Nasrallah's. Hizbullah's strength, and the despicable charisma of its leader, far from constituting Assad's salvation, more likely signal his eclipse."

Block Quotes:  
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"The Eclipse of Assad"

Editor-in-Chief David Horovitz wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 10): "If Assad senior was always said to have kept Hizbullah on a tight rein, allowing it freedom of action only when he deemed the moment right, what we have now is an unmistakable instance of the tail wagging the dog. Indeed, at what has been widely but inaccurately depicted as a demonstration against pressure for Syria's military departure from Lebanon, Nasrallah made no call for the Syrians to stay and actually endorsed the 1989 Taif accord -- which provides for the Syrian troops' withdrawal. Watching from Jerusalem, it was discomfiting, to put it mildly, to see the ease with which Nasrallah whipped up his multitudes into a chorus of anti-Israeli hatred. Plainly, Hizbullah's determination, and capacity, to play a central role in the struggle for power in Lebanon constitute a major headache for Israel. Watching from Damascus, though, should not have been a much happier experience -- if, that is, Assad has the nous to recognize what is transpiring. For Tuesday's rally was a blatant exhibition not of Assad's primacy but of Nasrallah's. Hizbullah's strength, and the despicable charisma of its leader, far from constituting Assad's salvation, more likely signal his eclipse."

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13. Iran: Nuclear Program:  
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Summary:  
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Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "From Israel's point of view, the political solution to the Iranian nuclear problem is preferable. But Israel must prepare the military option for itself, as well."

Block Quotes:  
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"How To Deter Iran"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 10): "Israel's deterrence must include several layers of protection. It must try not to stand alone against Iran, but to be part of a large organization. In light of the nuclear developments in Iran, Israel must give top priority to achieving a defense alliance with the U. S.... From Israel's point of view, the political solution to the Iranian nuclear problem is preferable. But Israel must prepare the military option for itself, as well. Such an option should be developed quietly, and not with belligerent statements and a show of strength, as is customary here from time to time. In the military option, we have to build the appropriate force, prepare the plans, and examine methods of clandestine activity inside Iran, as well. At the same time, we must not evade questions such as: What can Israel gain from employing a military option, and what will the Iranian response be."

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